



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
PEDESTRIAN & TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

Date: Thursday, July 16, 2020

Time: 6:30-8:00pm

Location: Virtual Meeting using GoToMeeting: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/539724445>

Community Representatives:

*Ted Alexander

*Ginny Alverson – Vice Chair

*Jessica Bellow

*Emma Blaxter

Georgy Cohen

*Laura Evans

Jessica Ferguson

*Rauvin Johl

Paola Massoli

*Audrey Orenstein – Secretary

*Vitor Pamplona

*Zach Rosenberg – Chair

*Julia Toof

*Emily Vides

Ex-Officio:

*Katjana Ballantyne, *City Council*

*Alexandra Kleyman, *Mobility Division, OSPCD*

*Justin Schreiber, *Mobility Division, OSPCD*

*=present

Guests:

Tom Lamar - *Vice Chair Somerville Bike Committee*

George Schneeloch - *Somerville Bike Safety*

Andy Reker

Acting Secretary: Ted Alexander

Call to order: 6:35PM

Procedural Business:

1. Introductions – Zach read off the list of names from the agenda and then screens that were logged in and we all gave a brief introduction.
2. Approval of June meeting minutes. Jessica B. moved to approve the June 18, 2020, meeting minutes, and Zach seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

City Update:

1. 2019 Pedestrian Count Data (Ali Kleyman)
 - a. City of Somerville counts cyclists and pedestrians every year in October. The counts are done by volunteers, and in 2019 the volunteer counts were augmented by camera turning movements counts done by a contractor. Those counts were likely lower than the volunteer counts because volunteers are more likely to go out when the weather is good, whereas the camera counts are scheduled in advance and can occur on rainy days. The count is intended to measure commuting.
 - b. City staff analyze and map the data from the counts. Results from the October 2019 counts are shown on the slides.
 - i. For the peak-hour pedestrian count (7 to 9 a.m. and 5 to 6 p.m. on weekdays), the highest counts are clustered around the Community Path, major squares, and major bus routes.
 - ii. Between 2018 and 2019, morning pedestrian counts increased in 16 areas and decreased in 10 areas. Evening counts increased in 12 areas and decreased in 18.
 - iii. Councilor Ballantyne observed that Powderhouse Blvd. has lower numbers than she would have expected considering that it is the gateway to Somerville, and that this likely means that a lot of trips are starting in the area between Teele Square and Route 16.
 - iv. Zach asked how the City uses the data from the pedestrian counts. Justin said that the count data is combined with data from other sources, such as MBTA ridership data, to produce information about mode share (numbers of people and vehicles using a corridor). Ali said the turning movement counts done with cameras by contractors can be used for engineering studies, and the counts can also be used for prioritizing implementation of Vision Zero plans.
2. MBTA Ridership Data (Justin Schreiber)
 - a. Data from MBTA on bus ridership by route shows that overall ridership is declining. Route 86 is the route with the highest ridership. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, data showed some increases in ridership on route 89, possibly as a result of the new bus lanes on Broadway. However, with the pandemic effects, it will take longer to see the impact of the bus lanes in ridership data.
 - b. Councilor Ballantyne asked whether the data for Route 89 includes both the Davis Square and the Clarendon Hill versions of the route. Justin said the slides show the combined data for both, but it can be broken out.
3. MBTA Ridership - Impact of COVID-19 (Justin Schreiber)
 - a. MBTA data on ridership by mode shows that commuter rail declined the most, bus the least. This shows the contrast between suburban workers and those who can work from home during the pandemic, and people who are dependent on the bus to get to work.
 - b. In Somerville, ridership declined less on some routes, for example the 95 to Sullivan Square, which serves more transit-dependent riders than some other routes. Route 85 (Spring Hill to Kendall Square) has not been running since March.

- c. Ridership has increased on certain routes, including Routes 90 and 91, since the first days of the pandemic.
4. City of Somerville Coordination with MBTA (Justin Schreiber)
- a. City of Somerville staff hold monthly meetings with the MBTA's Transit Priority Team. There are also monthly coordinating meetings with the MBTA, Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville. The MBTA is a large bureaucracy, but the Transit Priority Team helps coordinate and is very helpful for City staff.
 - b. The major projects the City is working on with the MBTA are the Washington Street underpass and the Broadway bus project. They are working on moving from passive transit signal priority on Broadway to active signal priority.
 - c. Bus stop amenities (shelters with advertising) are installed by the JCDecaux company under a 15-year contract with the MBTA. Benches without shelters are owned by the City, and there are some shelters that are owned by either the City or the MBTA.
 - d. Jessica B. asked whether the MBTA has a specific staff member assigned to work with Somerville. Justin said that the point of contact varies depending on the specific project or issue, but the Transit Priority Team's municipality engagement manager, Andrew McFarland, works with municipalities generally, including Somerville. If PTAC is interested in meeting with someone from the MBTA, a topic can be added to the agenda and Justin can work with Andrew McFarland to set up a meeting with the right person depending on the topic.
 - e. In response to a question about coordination on the Green Line Extension (GLX), Justin said that Viola Augustin is working with the MBTA and the contractor (GLX Constructors) on this and is advocating for the best possible version of new stations and other aspects of the GLX in Somerville.
5. Washington Street Bus Lane Design (Justin Schreiber)
- a. As shown on the slides, plans for Washington Street around the future Washington Street / East Somerville station on the Green Line include a 14-foot bus and bike lane, 10- and 11-foot travel lanes, and a protected bike lane, with a shared bike/pedestrian area for access to the new Green Line station.
 - b. Laura asked about the wayfinding plan for the area around the station – the plans look complicated, and it may be difficult to get around. Justin said there are placeholders in the plans for signs but the content of the signs is still to be determined.
 - c. Ginny asked whether there would be an audible signal along with the flashing beacon for crossing Washington Street. Justin said he believes there will be an audible signal and the City will try to make sure that there is. The beacon will be a flashing yellow light like the one at the bus stop on Somerville Avenue in the middle of Union Square – it will not be a HAWK beacon or red/yellow/green traffic signal.
 - d. PTAC members discussed the shared access path to the station, including width of the path and access for people with disabilities:
 - i. In response to questions from Audrey and Zach, Justin explained that there will be a bike path overhead by the Washington Street overpass that is at grade level with the Green Line, and then an access path that goes from the Washington Street station to Joy Street, which will be 12 feet wide and probably could not be widened because the bridge has already been built.

- ii. Ginny and Julia commented that without an elevator to the station, access to the station is going to be difficult for people with disabilities, because the access path will be used by cyclists and pedestrians – it does not look like a design that provides for good access for people with disabilities.
 - e. Regarding bicycle access, Tom Lamar recommended providing a better way for cyclists to turn left from Washington St. westbound onto Medford St. southbound.
 - f. Vitor suggested considering making the left lane of Washington St. westbound a left-turn only lane for the turn onto Medford Street. Justin said the City is interested in making Washington St. one lane throughout this area but will not be able to do so as part of this project.
6. Mobility Division Budget (Justin Schreiber)
- a. The fiscal year 2021 City budget proposal includes \$215,000 for professional and technical services under the Mobility Division. The proposal is to spend this on planning and design for Pearl Street (\$60k), Washington Street (\$60k), Davis Square – Holland/College intersection (\$65k), and Neighborways (\$30k). For Davis Square, the City received a grant from the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization for physical construction – the grant requires the City to pay for planning and design.
 - b. Laura asked about the redesign of the rotary on Powderhouse Blvd., and Ginny asked about budgeting for fixing the broken tactile strips at Central St. and Highland Ave. Justin said the design for the rotary is nearly complete, and it should be implemented in 2021. He also said that the Mobility Division’s budget is not generally used for hard construction, which would include repairs like fixing tactile strips, but rather for street design, pavement marking plans, conceptual design up to 25 percent, and pavement markings for new facilities.
 - c. Councilor Ballantyne explained that there is also other design work that is not included in the professional and technical services budget, for example the Alewife Brook Parkway redesign, which is being done under a state grant to the City of \$4.7 million. Justin added that other sources of funding include developer funds, state earmarks for specific intersections and projects, Community Block Grants, specific funds in the City budget for certain projects, and fees from Uber and Lyft.

Shared Streets:

1. **Barriers and Signage.** Justin asked for the committee’s opinion on installing sawhorses at the end of shared streets without initially installing any of the midblock treatments. Midblock treatments would be installed later as opportunities arise. This would save time and allow the Shared Streets network to be expanded more quickly. Jessica B. and Rauvin agreed that this would be a good approach. No one spoke against this approach, and Justin said the bike committee was also in favor of it.
2. **East-West Route Selection.** The committee discussed three options for east-west Shared Streets routes across the center of Somerville:
 - a. Vernon St. and Morrison Ave., skipping over private property at Maxwell’s Green

- b. Central Road to Hudson and Spencer Streets
- c. Willoughby St. to Albion St. and Lexington Ave.

Emily said that it is very dangerous to cross Lowell Street at the Lowell-Vernon intersection, and committee members generally agreed that the other two routes would be better options, especially if both of them could be implemented.

Other Business

Laura asked if the slides from the City update could be posted on the City website and/or the PTAC site. Justin said he would get them posted on the City website and also send them to Zach.

Emma and Zach are looking for committee members to get involved in the events and engagement subcommittee.